

PHILOSOPHY

YOUR AGE DOESN'T MATTER: THE RANDOM IMPACT RULE

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Outstanding discoveries are often preceded by publications of less memorable impact. However, despite the increasing desire to identify early promising scientists, the temporal career patterns that characterize the emergence of scientific excellence remain unknown [...]. We find that the highest-impact work in a scientist's career is randomly distributed within her body of work. That is, the highest-impact work can be, with the same probability, anywhere in the sequence of papers published by a scientist—it could be the first publication, could appear mid-career, or could be a scientist's last publication. This random-impact rule holds for scientists in different disciplines, with different career lengths, working in different decades, and publishing solo or with teams and whether credit is assigned uniformly or unevenly among collaborators.

What does this mean? If high impact research is being randomly distributed, that means that research success cannot be planned, neither by a scientist, nor by a research or funding organization. It means that all the overhead money that goes into reviews and organization is being lost if their goal is being “excellence” and not just building a broad research landscape with good weather conditions.

More references www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/Quantifying the evolution of individual scientific impact How much of your publication success is due to dumb luck? New tool ranks researchers' influence